

“SALVATION: NOW, NOT YET, AND IN-BETWEEN”

READ 1 PETER 1:3-5

I. INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began this sermon series on 1 Peter by studying the opening greeting in verses 1-2. That brief passage tells us a great deal about what it means to be a Christian. Christians are: elect of God; exiles in this world; foreknown by God; set apart for God by the power of the Holy Spirit; and obedient to the call of the gospel, which results in cleansing from sin.

Today, as we continue our study of this letter, we come to the first part of an extended section in which Peter gives an even more detailed description of the salvation that Jesus Christ has secured for his people. In this passage, Peter explains three aspects of our salvation: the “now;” the “not yet;” and the “in-between.” In these verses the Lord teaches us that salvation is something that we experience in the present, something that we will experience in the future, and something that keeps us secure as we wait for that future hope.

II. THE “NOW” ASPECT OF SALVATION (1:3)

We begin by looking at verse 3, where Peter describes the “now” of salvation. Verse 3 begins with this exclamation: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Peter begins his description of God’s plan of salvation by blessing God. We often use the term “bless” to describe the gracious favor that God bestows upon his people. Thus, at the close of our worship service we receive a benediction, which is a pronouncement of God’s blessing upon his people. But the Bible also uses the word “bless” in contexts where the blessing is being directed towards God. We find one example in Psalm 103, today’s call to worship: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” When we bless God, we are declaring that he is worthy of praise.

Peter could not write about God’s wondrous gift of salvation without first giving glory to God. God alone is worthy of praise for our salvation, for he is the author and perfecter of it, as this passage clearly shows. It is God who causes us to be born again. It is God who preserves our eternal inheritance in heaven. And it is God who preserves us as we wait for the unveiling of that salvation. To God alone be the glory!

Peter says that it is God’s merciful character that motivates his grace towards us. Our salvation is “according to his great mercy.” As members of fallen humanity, we are by nature objects of God’s wrath. But those who are members of God’s elect humanity in Jesus Christ are the objects of his mercy. It is vital that we understand our debt to God’s

mercy. We need to have a sense of our sinfulness and our spiritual helplessness before we can truly understand and receive the grace that is extended in the gospel. Otherwise, we will convince ourselves that there is at least some sense in which our goodness makes us acceptable to God. The gospel will not be the gospel to us until we begin to experience the helplessness, misery, and dread of our condition as sinners before a holy God. This is why Jesus said that he did not come to call the righteous but sinners (Mt. 9:13). It is only when we see ourselves as sinners that we will truly bless God for his mercy to us in Jesus Christ.

Peter further describes our present experience of salvation by saying that God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” The reason why we need to be born again is because we are dead in our sin. This is why Jesus said to Nicodemus: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The only way we can enjoy life in God’s presence is by having our old nature put to death and by receiving an entirely new nature. That is what happens when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. We die to the old, sinful humanity to which we belong in Adam, and we are born again as a part of the new, redeemed humanity in Christ. And Peter says that God is the one who causes us to be born again. The ultimate cause of the new birth is not a decision that we make. Rather, as we saw in the first two verses of this letter, it is because of God’s gracious and unmerited election. God is the one who transforms us from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive.

This new birth is integrally related to Jesus' resurrection from the dead, and this is why our hope is a living hope. Christians have been made alive with Christ in his resurrection. In raising Christ from the dead, God secured new life for all who are united to Christ; to all whom he elected unto salvation before time began. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are united to him and we enjoy all the blessings that he has secured for us by his death and resurrection. If you trust in Christ, then you have a living hope, a hope that is absolutely certain, because you are united to the living Christ. Our subjective hopes are grounded upon the object of our hope: the risen Christ. In this sense, the hope that we profess is a triumphant hope. The triumph has already taken place: Jesus has already been raised to new life. And we already participate in the blessings that he has secured for us. At the same time, we should be cautious of having a triumphalistic attitude about this life. Yes, our hope is a living hope, but it is not a hope in the things of this world. We should not expect final victory or utopia in this life. We must not grow disillusioned or depressed over the constant struggles we face. We have living hope but it is a hope that is focused upon the world to come. This is what Peter writes about in verse 4, where he explains the "not yet" aspect of salvation.

III. THE "NOT YET" ASPECT OF SALVATION

In verse 4, Peter speaks of the inheritance that awaits us. In Christ, we are adopted as God's children and made co-heirs with Christ, the one eternal Son of God. As Paul writes in Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit himself bears witness that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." Think about that for a moment! If you belong to Jesus Christ, then you have a share in the inheritance that belongs to him as the one and only Son of God! Jesus himself promises this in the book of Revelation, where he says, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Rev. 3:21)

This heavenly inheritance that awaits us is the grand fulfillment of the inheritance that God promised to Abraham and his offspring in the Old Testament. God told Abraham that he would give him the land of Canaan for an eternal inheritance. He said: "And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." (Gen. 17:8) In the pages of the Old Testament we can see how God kept that promise by bringing the people of Israel into the Promised Land. That was an important moment in the history of redemption, but it was not the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan was only a foreshadowing of a much greater fulfillment of God's promise. This is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews says that Abraham "was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." He says that Abraham and his descendants looked with faith for "a better

country...a heavenly one.” And that better country is “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” God’s promise of an inheritance for the people of Israel finds its true fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who will reign forever with his people in the new heavens and the new earth. If you belong to Jesus Christ, then you have a share in that eternal inheritance.

In our text, Peter speaks of both the quality and the security of this inheritance.

Concerning its quality, he shows how it is infinitely better than any kind of earthly inheritance. Even if you were the sole heir of a multi-billionaire, someone as wealthy as Bill Gates, the vast sum of your inheritance would not even be worthy of comparison to the inheritance of the saints in heaven. Peter lays emphasis upon this by using three terms to describe the quality of our heavenly inheritance. Our heavenly inheritance is imperishable. It will never end, unlike the things of this world, which will come to an end. They will be destroyed on the day of judgment, making way for God’s renewed creation. Also, our heavenly inheritance is undefiled. It is absolutely pure and free from all evil. It stands in sharp contrast to the things of this world, which have been corrupted by the fall. And our heavenly inheritance is unfading. It will never grow old, while the things of this world age, dry up, and wither. These three words show us that our heavenly inheritance is unsurpassed in its quality.

Peter also says something about the security of our heavenly inheritance. He says that it is absolutely certain, because it is kept safe for us in heaven. In this world, we look at the heir of a multi-billionaire and conclude that his future is secure. We say things like, “he has it made.” The inheritance of such a person is so vast that it is inconceivable that he would ever be in financial need. But Peter is saying that our heavenly inheritance is immeasurably more secure. It is being kept safe for us in heaven, where nothing can put it in jeopardy.

IV. THE “IN-BETWEEN” ASPECT OF SALVATION

This brings us to the last part of our passage: the “in-between” aspect of salvation. Christians have already experienced the new birth. We have been made alive to God through union with Christ in his resurrection. However, we still wait for the culmination of all of God’s promises to us in Christ. We wait for the inheritance that is being kept for us in heaven. And as we wait, we can take comfort in knowing that God is going to preserve us and keep us until the day of Christ’s return. Peter describes us as those “who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Take special note of that word “guarded.” What does this word imply? When do you guard something? What kinds of things need to be kept under guard?

We guard things when they are under threat of danger. If you have been to Washington, D.C. both before and after the September 11 attacks, you know that our government has taken much more serious measures to guard the White House since those attacks took place. These measures have been taken because of our awareness of a heightened degree of danger. We guard things when they are in danger.

We also guard things when they are weak, and fragile, and vulnerable. If you have ever seen a new mom or dad taking care of their newborn child, you know how very protective they are. Why are they so protective? Because they know that their baby is fragile and that he is utterly dependent upon them for his care. He needs to be guarded.

Christians need to be guarded for the same reasons. We are in danger, and we are extremely vulnerable and weak. Do not make the mistake of thinking that your path is easy. Do not think that you are free from danger. Do not think that you are strong. If you think those kinds of thoughts, then you will surely fall. Instead, admit your weakness and your sinfulness. Acknowledge your danger. And look to Christ to guard you and sustain you. For his power is made perfect in weakness. He is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. God is able to use our frailty, our struggles with sin, our trials and tribulations to keep us mindful of our dependence upon him. In the words of Richard Sibbes, “The consciousness of the church’s weakness makes her willing to lean on her beloved, and to

hide herself under his wing.” (*The Bruised Reed*, p. 10) God is our mighty fortress. The Lord is our rock, our refuge, and our strength. We always need to remember that it is the Lord who guards us and keeps us and carries us throughout our pilgrimage in this world. Do not rely on your own strength, on your own ability, or on your own perceived goodness and morality. Trust in the Lord to preserve you by his power.

Peter says that God guards us by his power through faith. God keeps and preserves his elect until the last time by enabling us to lay hold of Christ by faith. We live by faith. There are two essential components to what it means to live by faith. On the one hand, it requires us to have a true understanding of our continued sinfulness and frailty. We do not stop being sinful once we experience the new birth. Our sins are forgiven, but sin still resides within us all throughout this life. Neither do we become spiritual superheroes once we are born again. We are brought from death to life, but we remain dependent upon Christ for our new life, just as the branch is dependent upon the vine for its life. If we lose sight of our continued dependence upon Christ, we will grow proud and self-reliant, and this will cause us to think less of Christ. It is only as we remain conscious of our sinfulness and our weakness that we will set a high value upon Jesus Christ.

And this is closely related to the second component of living by faith. Living by faith means looking to Jesus Christ and trusting that he is sufficient for you. It means trusting that you do not need anything more than what God gives you in Christ. In Christ we

have every spiritual blessing. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God, and Christ himself is our life. Everything else is rubbish compared to knowing Christ. He is all-sufficient for us.

Our passage concludes by saying that the salvation that we enjoy in Christ is “ready to be revealed in the last time.” Jesus has already secured this salvation for us, by his death and resurrection. It has already been obtained. It is certain and it is secure. And we have already begun to experience this salvation through the new birth. However, our salvation has not yet been fully revealed. We still await an inheritance, an inheritance that is being kept for us in heaven. That inheritance will be unveiled in the last time, on the day when Jesus returns to judge the world and to gather his people to their eternal home. On that day, God will bring an end to the world as we know it, and he will make a new beginning.

It may seem like that day is far off and distant, and that may very well be true. Then again, it may not be very far off at all. We do not have access to such knowledge. But there is one thing that we know for sure: its coming is absolutely certain. And for this reason, we should not get too comfortable in this world. If you belong to Christ, then this world is not your true home. In fact, it is a dangerous place for pilgrims, fraught with temptations, perils, and pitfalls. You need to remember this, but you need not despair. Keep your eyes fixed upon Christ. He is the good shepherd. He calls, tends, feeds, and

Sermon on 1 Peter 1:3-5
OT Reading: Isaiah 42:1-9

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guards his sheep. No one can snatch them from his hand. He will preserve you as you live in these “in-between” times.